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SIPDIS

STATE FOR PM/WRA, BELGRADE FOR PODGORICA

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TAGS: PREL MASS MCAP PGOV SI

SUBJECT: ITF ADVISORY BOARD REACHED CONSENSUS ON FUNCTIONAL EXPANSION

REF: LJUBLJANA 504

Classified By: Ambassador Yousif B. Ghafari, reasons 1.4(b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) On November 11, James Lawrence, acting director of PM/WRA, and emboff attended the semiannual Advisory Board meeting for the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF) (reftel). The Advisory Board discussed the strategic review and strategic options for ITF's future and reached consensus that Option 2, functional expansion within Southeastern Europe, was the preferred choice among the donor countries. The Advisory Board's conclusions will be included in the ongoing strategic review and presented to the Managing Board, which had previously taken a position in support of Option 4, both geographical and functional expansion. Prior to the Advisory Board meeting, Lawrence discussed the need for greater coordination between the GoS and PM/WRA with Stanislav Vidovic, director of MFA's Security Policy Division and ITF Managing Board member. Lawrence and Vidovic also discussed possible changes in ITF's leadership, as well as the support of ITF of proposed Foreign Minister Samuel Zbogar. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On November 10, Lawrence and emboff met with Goran Gacnik, ITF's director, Sabina Beber Bostjancic, head of ITF's internal relations, Istok Hocevar, international relations advisor to ITF's director, and Alastair McAslan, director of the Humanitarian Resilience Center at Cranfield University and leader of the ITF's strategic review. When Lawrence asked about the progress of the study, McAslan explained that the ITF would present the 5 year strategy and 3 year workplan at the Advisory Board meeting, and said that he welcomed input from the donors on those documents. McAslan said that the Managing Board on November 4 had only "taken note" of those documents and wanted to get donor input before any final "approval." McAslan concurred with Lawrence that there had been problems with the study and garnered Gacnik's agreement to improve communication with PM/WRA.

Functional Expansion in SE Europe

¶3. (U) On November 11, the ITF Advisory Board met in Ig for its semiannual meeting. McAslan presented the strategic review as prepared thus far and the four strategic options: 1) continue with the current geographical focus on SE Europe and functional emphasis on demining; 2)

maintain geographical focus on SE Europe and gradually expand into other security areas, e.g. small arms/light weapons (SA/LW); 3) maintain functional focus on demining and expand geographically outside of SE Europe; 4) combine options 2 and 3 to expand both geographically and functionally. Following McAslan's presentation, Ambassador Boris Frlec, former Slovene Foreign Minister and Slovenia's representative on the Advisory Board, stressed that the GoS would continue to support ITF with "the same intensity," since the GoS saw the effort and expense as "justifiable" in order to maintain ITF's expertise and expand its activities.

¶4. (U) Representatives from Spain, the Czech Republic, Belgium, the European Commission, and the US made comments in support of Option 2, functional expansion within SE Europe. The Japanese representative indicated his country's support for Option 3, geographical expansion. Following the interventions, Ambassador Frlec, who was chairing the meeting, summarized the sense of the Advisory Board as being in favor of Option 2 with a small expansion to the Caucasus. McAslan then responded to the various questions raised, noting that the 3 year workplan articulated the "concern and caution" of the donors, but perhaps needed more refinement. He said that even under Option 2, ITF would need to have some flexibility in order to take advantage of opportunities that fit its competitive advantages and expertise.

Concerns about ITF Leadership

¶5. (C) After the meeting, Lawrence spoke privately with Vidovic. Vidovic expressed his hope for better coordination with PM/WRA so as to avoid any further confusion about the study and any Managing Board activities. He mentioned the possibility of new leadership within the ITF, as Gacnik's contract will be up for renewal in 2009 and there have been tensions between Gacnik and donors and other stakeholders. Vidovic also commented on the possibility of Samuel Zbogar becoming Foreign Minister, noting that this would make things easier because of Ambassador Zbogar's familiarity with the issues.

Comment

¶6. (C) Ambassador Zbogar's nomination for Foreign Minister means that ITF will stay at the top of the MFA's priorities. During his recently-concluded assignment as Slovenia's ambassador to the US, Zbogar put in a lot of miles on the road for ITF, running three marathons and several half-marathons to raise funds and highlight ITF's work. The GoS will hope to get more foreign policy mileage out of the ITF even as its initial goal of a mine-free SE Europe becomes a reality. The Advisory Board's recommendation for Option 2 reinforces, however, that ITF and GoS need to continue open and diligent engagement with the donor community to ensure that ITF successfully transitions to a new mission.

¶7. (U) PM/WRA Director Lawrence cleared in substance.
GHAFARI